



Participatory Practices: Learning From Experience^{*}

PN-ABZ-558

4

MOBILIZING NATIONAL PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR LEADERS

*A National Meeting on Girls' Education in Guatemala*¹

The Problem

Guatemala has the highest rate of female illiteracy in the Western Hemisphere, exceeded only by Haiti. Rural women alone constitute more than 47 percent of the illiterate population, and 71.9 percent of Mayan women are illiterate. In 1987 USAID contracted a firm to conduct an analysis of data on Guatemala (socio-demographic data collected for the Demographic Health Survey) in order to study the relationship between primary education of girls and indicators of social and economic development. The data convinced USAID/Guatemala that in fact girls' education plays a critical role in Guatemala's development. USAID also assessed the barriers to girls' education in Guatemala and determined that primary among them were non school-system barriers, such as family resource levels, community beliefs and practices, macro and micro policies, and lack of infrastructure.

USAID concluded that these barriers could be addressed best by those individuals, institutions, and agencies that directly control the identified issues and resources or have the influence needed to address them effectively--government ministers, religious leaders, heads of business and industry, leaders of professional organizations, the media, unions, and political parties. USAID/Guatemala determined that for sustainable changes to occur for girls, the leadership of the country would need to be mobilized to consider the implications of girls'

USAID PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES: LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE is a series of studies of participatory approaches in USAID programs. They are intended to help staff consider similar approaches and further share experience. USAID's Participation Forum and GP-NET, an electronic conversation group, enable development practitioners worldwide to discuss problems and successes in the use of participation. For further information please e-mail Diane La Voy (DLAVOY@USAID.GOV) or Wendy Kapustin (WKAPUSTIN@USAID.GOV).

Naydu Yaniz drafted the following summary after extensive consultations with USAID/Guatemala, Susie Clay (G/HCD), and PPC as well as a thorough review of available project documentation.

education for the country's development. The USAID Mission decided that the first step in mobilizing the country's decision makers would be to sponsor a national meeting where policy-makers could gather to review the data and determine whether they wished to take action to address the problem.

In order to bring this information to the attention of the country's leaders, USAID invited the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) representative in Guatemala and the National Office of Women (of the Ministry of Labor) to co-sponsor a one day national meeting on girls' education.

The Practice and its Results: Planning a National Meeting for Policy

On January 29, 1991, following a year of planning, a national meeting for Guatemala's policy-makers was held: "Educating Girls, Achieving the Development of Guatemala." For the first time, national public- and private-sector policy-makers assembled in order to assess the importance of girls' education for Guatemala's development. The movement was led by Guatemalans with the participation of only one USAID employee. The Guatemalan planning committee--about ten individuals from various sectors--took on the issue as their own by spearheading the planning, implementation, and follow-up activities for the national meeting, as well as volunteering significant monetary resources and time. The planners consisted of business owners, such as the owner of the country's largest department store chain and an owner of a leading national survey research firm, a Guatemalan UN official; and a well known academic.

Building a Constituency

Policy-makers were drawn into the national meeting by the planning committee with tailor-made presentations, publications, and handouts illustrating the importance of girls' education. This marketing strategy was important because each individual had his or her own political beliefs and ideological bents. Data on economic benefits and increases in productivity related to girls' education were highlighted to address the interests of the private sector. Likewise, a presentation to a government minister or clergyman was addressed to his or her interests, and the data illustrated the particular benefits of investing in girls' education valued by each of the participants.

The planning committee also developed and coordinated a publicity program, which included a series of press releases, a logo designed by a local agency to identify the initiative, and a photo exhibition of Guatemalan girls conducted by a local photographer for display at the national meeting. Of all the services described, only the photo services and the logo design were paid for with donor funds; all other services were contributed by the growing number of individuals who donated their own resources or mobilized those of others. Through their personal contacts, these individuals were able to obtain television, radio, and newspaper publicity.

The Conference Gives Birth to a National Commission

At the national meeting, one hundred participants each received a packet of reference materials, including a set of data demonstrating, for the first time, the relationship between girls' primary education and improvements in health, income, education, and employment generation. Although the data were presented to the participants, the strategy was an active one that challenged them to analyze and draw their own conclusions. The first phase of the national meeting consisted of analysis of the research reports and documentation provided. The second phase was the formulation of goal statements on the impact of the status of girls' education on national development. During the third phase, the working groups converged and collaboratively drafted goal statements and policy recommendations for action.

The result and highlight of the national meeting was a decision to form a National Commission of 12 public and private sector policy-makers to create a national emergency plan to address girls' educational needs, as well as to implement a national campaign to raise public awareness of the importance of girls' education. During the year following the National Meeting, the National Commission also published and presented to the President a needs assessment and plan of action, which included 40 project profiles that could be implemented by public and private sector institutions.

Three years later, girls' education was declared a presidential and ministerial policy and the National Commission was converted into a legal entity, the Guatemalan Association for Girls' Education, which coordinates a number of girls' education projects in the country. The Guatemalan Congress approved a five-year scholarship program for rural, indigenous, primary school girls, fully funded with Guatemalan resources, which reached 5,000 girls during its first year. By 1995 approximately 30 to 35 NGOs, private organizations, and businesses were involved in a wide range of activities designed to promote girls' education.

Discussion Points

- 1) Although USAID determined that the barriers to girls' education could be addressed best by those individuals, institutions, and agencies that directly controlled the resources and/or had the influence needed to address them effectively -- government ministers, heads of industry, etc.-- individuals from indigenous organizations participated in designing the strategy for planning and implementing the national meeting.
- 2) The subject of the national meeting was not education, but rather Guatemala's social and economic development. The education of girls was highlighted as a means of achieving that development. Discussing the benefits to the nation's development that would accrue from investment in the education of girls also helped to neutralize potentially controversial issues and to communicate a clear message to industrialists, bankers, and business owners in terms that they understood well.

- 3) The barriers to girls' education are multiple and are not exclusively educational. Therefore it was critical to achieve collaboration among government agencies (e.g., ministries of health, finance, economy, and roads; the military; and the justice system, etc.), rather than only with the Ministry of Education; and among private sector institutions such as religious entities, business and industry, universities, and the media as well.
- 4) In the course of planning the national meeting and in implementing actions following the meeting, members of the National Commission noted that they had been operating according to an evolving set of principles (*Principios Fundamentales*) and rules (*Reglas del Juego*), which they then agreed to formally present as the Guiding Principles and Ground Rules of the National Commission, and later of the Guatemalan Association for Girls' Education. By agreeing on these principles, the participants were able to maintain a common vision and objectives in an initiative made up of people of diverse backgrounds.
- 5) A year-long program of presentations and publicity on girls' education to key policy-making groups from all sectors was essential. This strategy of marketing the presentation to each policy-maker's interests was successful in creating a strong and growing constituency in support of girls' education.
- 6) With only \$20,000 allocated to plan and implement the national meeting, and with no assurance that additional funds would be allocated, USAID/Guatemala had to devise strategies for leveraging the funds. Also, USAID's approach to girls' education was to focus on mobilizing policy-makers with decision-making authority for human and financial resources in their institutions and a strong sense of ownership of the country's development problems. This approach encouraged a sustainable initiative that was truly Guatemalan.

VI. Resources

Clay, Susan A. *Planning and Implementing a Conference for Policy-makers: a Development Model*. Office of Health and Education, USAID/Guatemala. (PN-ABK-229)

Clay, Susan A. *From Oversight to Policy Initiative: the Education of Girls in Guatemala*. USAID/Guatemala paper presented at the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Annual Meeting, San Diego, California, March 21-24, 1994.

Educating Girls: Achieving the Development of Guatemala: First National Meeting. Guatemala, January 29, 1991. (PN-ABK-452)